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An office whose time has gone

The February 2010 primary showed that the office of lieutenant governor of Illinois is now superfluous. A brief walk through history shows how this happened.

We've had a lieutenant governor since Illinois became a state in 1818. The first governor was Shadrach Bond, who represented the English-speaking settlement of Southern Illinois. His lieutenant governor was Pierre Menard, who represented the old French settlers.

The goal of "political balance" between the governor and lieutenant governor was paramount for over a century.

Although both candidates ran for the nomination and election separately, those elected were always of the same party. The chief duties of the lieutenant governor were to preside over the Illinois Senate and to take over if the governor left the state or vacated office.

During the 19th century, two governors resigned when the General Assembly elected them U.S. senators (1873 and 1883), and one resigned to become a U.S. congressman (1830). One died in office (1857). In each case, the lieutenant governor succeeded.

In 1940 it was clear that Gov. Henry L. Horner distrusted his lieutenant governor and fellow-Democrat, John H. Stelle. When Horner had a stroke, he refused to resign, hoping to live to the end of his term. When he died on Oct. 6, 1940, Stelle became governor for the remaining three months of the term.

In 1967 Gov. Otto Kerner Jr., resigned to become a judge on the 7th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals. His lieutenant governor, Samuel H. Shapiro, with whom he was apparently on good terms, succeeded him. Illinois Republicans sensed that Shapiro would be vulnerable after only a year in office and began a campaign to recapture both the governorship and lieutenant governorship.

In November 1968, the unthinkable happened. The voters elected Richard B. Ogilvie, a suburban Republican, to be governor, but also elected Paul Simon, the Downstate Democrat who was Shapiro's "running mate," to be lieutenant governor. For the first time in Illinois history, the governor and lieutenant governor were not of the same party.

Because both were men of stature ("class" is the best word), they put on a good public face. When U.S. Sen. Everett Dirksen died in the summer of 1969, Simon did not take advantage of Ogilvie's absence from the state to appoint a replacement senator. However, when Simon announced in 1971 that he would run for Ogilvie's



Law and Public Issues

By Ann Lousin

Ann M. Lousin has been on the faculty of The John Marshall Law School since 1975. She has also had a career in state government, including being a research assistant at the 1969-1970 constitutional convention and parliamentarian of the Illinois House of Representatives, 1973-1975.

office, their relationship understandably changed.

The 1970 Constitution required the governor and lieutenant governor to run together in the general election. However, it left the matter of nomination of the lieutenant governor to the General Assembly.

From 1971 to 1973, when was I was a lawyer on the House Republican staff, I drafted several different options. The most popular was the one requiring the governor and lieutenant governor hopefuls to run together as a team in the primary. Another option was the nomination of the lieutenant governor by the party convention then held after the primary.

Although the Republicans favored the joint-nomination system, the Democrats preferred to continue the "open field" races for both offices. Then came the 1972 Democratic primary. Dan Walker defeated Paul Simon for the gubernatorial nomination, while Neil Hartigan, who had "run with" Simon, was nominated for the secondary post.

When the Walker-Hartigan ticket won, Walker let Hartigan know that he regarded Hartigan as simply a member of the faction loyal to Mayor Daley. In Walker's autobiography he described his informing Hartigan that he feared Hartigan would repeat everything they said to Daley. In effect, Walker's second-in-command was his deputy governor, Vic DeGrazia.

This left Hartigan with virtually no official role. The 1970 Illinois Constitution had removed the one constitutional duty exercised by the lieutenant governor since 1818, that of presiding over the Senate. This was a popular move in the legislative branch because the senators preferred electing one of their own to be both the parliamentary and political head of their chamber and because the House members preferred dealing with only one "head" of the Senate, not two.

Successive gubernatorial nominees of both parties have frequently declined to choose a specific running mate in the primary. Even when they have

chosen a specific "running mate" in the primary, the voters have not always agreed with them.

If the 1972 Democratic primary was not a wake-up call, the 1986 Democratic primary should have been. The former U.S. senator and Illinois treasurer, Adlai Stevenson III, had selected State Rep. George Sangmeister as his running mate.

Apparently no one in the campaign realized that the idiosyncratic LaRouche party was running "serious" candidates in the Democratic party primary. Two weeks before the primary, Sangmeister reported that his German name was drawing "high negatives," while the LaRouchie candidate, Mark Fairchild, was projecting a favorable WASP image. Democratic voters did not tie "Stevenson" with "Sangmeister."

On primary day, Stevenson was shocked to discover that he was saddled with Fairchild. He resigned from the Democratic ticket and founded a third party, the Solidarity party. In the ensuing confusion, the incumbent governor, James R. Thompson, was virtually guaranteed re-election.

Since 1986 the lieutenant governors have regularly expressed frustration with their office. Dave O'Neal resigned the post in 1981, saying he had nothing to do; Bob Kustra did likewise in 1998. George H. Ryan campaigned on the floor of the legislature against the Equal Rights Amendment, a measure that Gov. Thompson supported. Patrick J. Quinn claimed he rarely spoke with "his" governor, Rod R. Blagojevich, and turned on Blagojevich in public during their last months in their offices.

In fact, the only lieutenant governor who seems to have enjoyed the office, at least in her public appearances, was the only woman to hold it: Corinne Wood. While Gov. Ryan's "Light Guv," she championed the fight against breast cancer, among other causes. Most notably, she refused to comment upon allegations that Ryan was corrupt and would soon be indicted. She simply said she considered it "inappropriate for the one who would succeed the governor to comment." (Cf. Vice President Al Gore's constant defense of President Clinton during the Clinton impeachment and trial.)

By now, it is clear that neither the governors nor the lieutenant governors think highly of the office of "Light Guv." When both Pat Quinn and Dan Hynes said they "could work with any of the candidates for lieutenant governor," they clearly did not know that one of them was a millionaire pawnbroker with embarrassing skeletons in his closet.

It's time to abolish the post of lieutenant governor.